

**TOPIC:**

**Impacts of COVID-19 on Long-Term Care**

**Facilities:** Consider the following issues in light of the COVID-19 pandemic:

1) Review the state's response to the pandemic, specifically as it relates to emergency regulations that prohibited visitation of residents of long-term care facilities by family members. Examine the physical and mental health impacts of the visitation policy on long-term care residents.

2) Review emergency waivers of regulations of long-term care facilities during the pandemic and make recommendations on whether regulations should be permanently waived or removed.

My mother has been a resident of The Medallion Assisted Living Facility in Houston, Texas for the past 11 years. In those 11 years, she has experienced two heart attacks, been through chemotherapy treatment 3 times for recurrent lymphoma, had 2 pacemaker replacements, recuperated from a broken hip and most recently a series of mini strokes which have affected her memory and ability to retrieve thoughts and words. Her hearing is poor and communicating by phone is difficult.

No residents at The Medallion have tested positive for COVID-19; yet, residents have been severely restricted in their movements and are required to eat all meals in their rooms. The degree of social isolation is serious and heart-wrenching for these elderly citizens. As a result of eating all meals in her room, my mother has lost weight, her nutrition is poor and her overall physical condition has substantially weakened and deteriorated in the past five months due to the COVID-19 situation. Doctor visits are only "allowed" for emergencies and so she has been unable to do regular visits with her cardiologist and oncologist.

Five weeks ago, she became dehydrated and was very upset over her weakened condition. She asked to be taken to

the hospital and I was unable to get to her facility in time to prevent that. She did not understand the consequences of that decision - the fact that she would go to the hospital alone, be in the hospital alone and then have to quarantine for 14 days in order to return to her apartment. She spent 4 days at Methodist Hospital in Houston receiving no other treatment but IV fluids for her dehydration. It was recommended that she be discharged to the rehab section of the Nursing Home that is adjacent to her assisted living facility. She fulfilled her 14 day quarantine and benefitted from 2 weeks of physical, occupational and speech therapy.

Unfortunately, when it was time for discharge, she was told she would again have to quarantine for another 14 days inside her apartment at The Medallion next door even though she had repeatedly tested negative for COVID several times before going to the hospital, twice in the hospital and then again several times while in rehab/quarantine for 14 days. She was told that dedicated staff would have to be hired to care for her because she was considered a "new" admission. Her transfer back to The Medallion was delayed for nearly a week because of the dedicated staff situation.

Today, August 14, 2020, she celebrated her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday alone in her room at The Medallion. The only person allowed to enter her room is the dedicated staff person. Despite the fact that 2+ weeks was spent on rehab for her, she is now not allowed to leave her room for another 14 day quarantine period even though she has already quarantined for 14 days and repeatedly tested negative for COVID-19. Whatever progress was made in improving her physical condition and enhancing her mobility will likely be lost since there is really no place to walk more than 5 steps within her room. Of course she is still restricted to her room for all meals. This is absolutely ridiculous and makes no sense in any way medically. I am told these are decisions made by the Medical Director in conjunction with the Houston Health Department.

My mother is the one at greater risk from contacting the virus from a staff member who comes into the facility every day from the outside world exposed to whatever and whoever they have encountered since their last shift. How can SHE possibly be the one to threaten the health or safety of another individual if she repeatedly has tested negative and has already completed one 14 day quarantine? How does it make any sense for staff members at these facilities to go in and out every day, every shift but families cannot enter? Families could go through the same testing and screening procedures, and take the same exact necessary precautions that staff members take and they certainly have more at stake in keeping their loved one healthy than any random staff person at any facility.

This is what happens when government agencies issue "guidelines" and then allow facilities to interpret on their own. There is a vast difference in what goes on between facilities. Some have been allowing visitation for the past 5 months to varying degrees and others have been totally locked down. There is no supervision or enforcement of any guideline or regulation issued by the governor or anyone else. These facilities do as they please according to what their financial status is, how much resources they have or want to put towards facilitating visitation or anything else associated with this pandemic. Now that there are "new" guidelines concerning visitation, some facilities will elect to do the paperwork necessary to achieve Phase I facility designation. Others will not bother, so those residents will continue indefinitely without seeing their families.

I fully believe that the treatment of elderly citizens in nursing homes and assisted living facilities in Texas and probably elsewhere in this country during the COVID-19 pandemic is borderline inhumane and cruel. Government restrictions meant to keep these people "safe" and protected is slowly but surely killing them with loneliness, isolation and depression - not to mention the severe repercussions on their bodies physically. Most of them, if given the choice, would prefer to die from the virus than waste away alone without any family support

whatsoever. The "safe at all cost" attitude from the government is ridiculous. Safe from what? Safe from an inevitable death from one thing or another? I'd rather be able to say (and I believe my mother agrees) that she'd prefer to die from the virus than from loneliness and isolation.

I urge everyone on this committee to put yourself or your loved one in the shoes of those who are experiencing this incredible injustice. Would you want to live your last months/years locked up like a prisoner or would you want your elderly parent/relative to endure that while you stood by helplessly?

I urge you to immediately put into effect whatever mandate is necessary to allow just even ONE family member to visit on a regular basis without imposing all of the restrictive "rules" on these facilities that exist currently that only prolong indefinitely the current situation for these elderly people.